DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 377 HE 035 691

AUTHOR	Harrison, Jane E.
TITLE	The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review. Professional File, Spring 2002.
INSTITUTION	Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education.
REPORT NO	CSSHE-PF-21
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	20p.; Support provided by the Max Bell Foundation.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Literature Reviews; *Performance Based Assessment; *School Effectiveness; *Universities
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada

ABSTRACT

Because stakeholders within and outside of the university community appear to agree that issues related to teaching, especially the relationship between research and teaching, are worthy of serious debate, this bibliographic paper is a beginning to a major policy study of performance evaluation and pedagogical accountability in Canadian universities. This broad survey of the international literature on teaching quality, faculty performance, and accountability demonstrates that there is an enormous quantity of material on the subject. Much of this originates in the United States, but scholars in Canada, Britain, Australia, Europe, and elsewhere have contributed. A substantial portion is produced by education researchers, but much of the literature consists of the working documents of university task forces, centers of teaching excellence, and administrative bodies. The literature reflects the often divergent objectives of policy makers, university administrators, faculty organizations, and scholars, but it also reflects the determination of these very different groups to work towards a common goal of ensuring the quality of university teaching. (Contains 42 endnotes and 73 references.) (SLD)

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Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

Jane E. Harrison

Spring 2002 No. 21

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Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

La Société canadienne pour l'étude de l'enseignement supérieur

Professional File

Spring 2002, Number 21
le printemps 2002, numéro 21

The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review

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Introduction [1]

Issues of teaching performance, assessment, and accountability in postsecondary education have emerged throughout the industrialized west as part of a broadly-based reconsideration of the role of the university. Facing the myriad pressures of fiscal restraint, technological change, and increasing international competitiveness, universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, parts of Europe, and Australia have embarked on extensive programmes of self-evaluation and restructuring. The issues under debate, both within the university and the public at large, have included such fundamental matters as: the place of the university in society; who should control decision making within the university; the goals of postsecondary education; and the appropriate focus of university research. The specific emphasis on teaching derives from a desire to improve not only the efficiency but also the quality of university teaching, and to generate structures of assessment and accountability that will serve both the university community and outside stakeholders including governments, taxpayers, and patrons.

In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, the Canadian university community has itself been forced to confront many of the same pressures as its American and European counterparts. Diminishing public funding for universities has produced a concomitant (and controversial) increase in both private sources of funding and in tuition fees, while claims of declining academic standards and failing morale in the professoriate have prompted a renewed public debate about the socio-economic utility of the university (Bercuson, Bothwell & Granatstein, 1984, 1997; Granatstein 1998). Canadians worry that their universities are losing their competitive edge vis-à-vis their international counterparts (and that they may even be suffering an academic "brain drain") — a trend that has been blamed on university "working conditions (heavy teaching and administrative loads), inadequate support for research and, to a lesser extent, uncompetitive salaries"

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(Province of Ontario, 1996). Matters of university policy and practice, once little scrutinized outside academe, have now become the common currency of public debate.[2] In this climate, issues pertinent to university teaching — student/teacher ratios, teaching methods, professorial workloads, the role of teaching assistants, and especially the historic relationship of research and teaching — have become part of a much broader discussion about the funding, management and accountability of public institutions. Precisely because stakeholders within and without the university community appear to agree that these are matters worthy of serious debate, it is a propitious time for a major policy study of performance evaluation and standards of pedagogical accountability in Canadian universities. This bibliographic paper is the first stage of that larger project.

Origins of the Debate Around Teaching

The Ideal of Balance

Most authors writing about the role of the university agree that universities were established for a dual purpose: to teach, and to conduct research.[3] Ideally, these two responsibilities hang in delicate balance both within the framework of the institutions themselves and through the career of every faculty member. In the classical conception of university life, the two roles co-exist in a symbiotic relationship, each informing and enriching the other. The student learns within and is inspired by an environment of enquiry and creativity; while faculty are re-energized and revitalized by the act of teaching, through which they gain new perspectives on old ideas. The resulting synergy is what differentiates the university from other teaching and learning environments, providing students with an entrée into the life of the mind in action.[4]

Realistically, of course, few expect the balance between teaching and research to ever be as equal or perfect as the ideal prescribes. It is commonly acknowledged that the time and energy faculty devote to teaching or research will vary over the course of a career (see University of Tennessee, 1999a; University of Washington, 1999). Inevitably, there will also be times when the two conflict, each competing for a professor's limited time, energy, and attention. Beyond this, there is considerable variation in the expectations made of faculty in different classes of institutions: the faculty of universities and colleges that function primarily as undergraduate teaching institutions are not expected to maintain the same kind of balance between research and teaching as are the faculty of major research universities (see Lowry & Hansen, 2000).

An Imbalance Between Teaching and Research

The debate over the issue of university teaching derives in large part from the growing perception that in many universities the balance between the two essential roles of the university has shifted and that research has increasingly been given priority over teaching. Ernest Boyer (1990) complained of this in his major study Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities for the Professoriate in which he argued, "a wide gap now exists between the myth and reality of research, teaching, and service."[5] The same opinion was echoed in Canada in the 1991 Report of the Commission of Enquiry on Canadian Education which concluded that teaching was also "seriously undervalued" at Canadian universities.[6] These complaints have been repeated ever since in both Canada and the United States (e.g., Felder, Stice, & Rugarcia, 2000; Gray, Froh, & Diamond, 1992; Knapper & Rogers, 1994.)

Specifically, commentators argue that faculty incentive and reward structures at many universities encourage research activity much more than teaching. Universities have been slow to develop effective means of evaluating faculty teaching comparable to the rigorous assessment process to which their research is subject. Instead, commentators complain that teaching is often cursorily assessed and is

rarely an important element in career advancement. In making decisions around tenure, it is argued, many universities commonly place primary emphasis on a candidate's research performance and pay only passing notice to quality of teaching. This was the conclusion reached in 1991 by a Cornell University task force that studied a series of tenure appeal cases and concluded that teaching performance was poorly and unevenly evaluated within the institution (Cornell University, 1997). In the promotion process, commentators stress that advancement is often primarily dependent on the assessment of faculty members' research.

This imbalance between how teaching and research are rewarded, it is argued, creates a culture that privileges the latter. In this environment faculty rarely discuss their teaching with one another, and tend not to consider teaching a respectable subject for scholarly enquiry. At the same time, this situation encourages faculty to focus the bulk of their energies on research and scholarly publishing, often at the expense of teaching. The perception on the part of some faculty that the effort they put into teaching is unlikely to gain either the respect of their peers or to help advance their careers, means there is little incentive to revise curricula, design new courses, adopt new methods and approaches, and develop innovative assignments.

A Need for a Renewed Focus on the Quality of Teaching

Commentators differ on how they perceive the gravity of this situation. Some write largely from a concern for fairness, pointing out that most university faculty work very hard at their teaching and that they deserve recognition for this. They present efforts to support and improve teaching simply as an essential part of the university's mission. Others are concerned that the quality of teaching in higher education is suffering. Regardless of their perspective, all writers believe that universities must make a renewed commitment to teaching, and that the current system of faculty rewards and the culture within departments mitigates against this.

Feeding into this is the sense on the part of some commentators that faculty need to change the way they teach. They argue that the new economy places new expectations on its workers and requires of them new skills and abilities. To ensure that students are better prepared for this environment, universities must change how they teach students and assess what they have learned. This, these commentators argue, will require substantial innovation from teaching faculty; something they feel is unlikely to occur unless the current system of faculty rewards is changed (Felder et al., 2000; see also Carnegie Foundation, 1998).

Underlying much of what is written, particularly by American commentators, is a sense that for the public — increasingly concerned about the use of their tax dollars — and for students paying rising tuition fees, the quality of university teaching is an issue of growing importance. Repeatedly, university policy documents and teaching task forces refer to the public perception that university faculty do not spend as much time as they should teaching, and that their teaching sometimes lacks rigour and originality. At the same time, running through this public discourse is the conviction of some that time spent on research is to the detriment of teaching. There is a strong sense in much of the literature on teaching improvement and evaluation that universities ignore the interests of these taxpayers, students, and the public officials who often take up their concerns, at their peril. As a result, university administrators and policy makers commonly emphasize that universities must focus on the nature and quality of university instruction and work to create an environment in which excellence in teaching is encouraged and recognized, both for its own sake and because the public demands it.

The Issue of Performance Evaluation

Through and alongside this discussion of the need for a renewed focus on the quality of teaching is the issue of performance evaluation (see Lyall, 1997; University of Mississippi, 1995). Part of the impetus for this comes from a commitment to the *formative* evaluation of faculty — that is, the desire to assess the quality of university instruction in order to help and encourage individual faculty members to improve their teaching. Performance evaluation is also promoted on *summative* grounds. In the simplest form of this second approach, the evaluation of faculty performance is intended as an important component of the tenure and promotion process. The assessment of teaching performance can also be employed as an externally visible measure of the performance of the institution by legislators and external funding bodies as a way of assessing the university's worthiness (e.g. *AAHE Bulletin,* 2000). This last facet of performance evaluation has been increasingly emphasized by fiscally conscious governments determined to hold publicly funded universities and their faculty accountable for their performance.

The Two Facets of Improving University Teaching

There are two issues involved in the contemporary discussion of the improvement of university teaching. One is: what is good teaching? What should university faculty be doing; how can they better involve their students in the experience of learning; how can they help students develop the new skills the changing marketplace may demand; what has been learned over the last few decades about inspiring students; what measures can be used to assess what students have actually learned?

The other important issue focuses on the environment that makes this kind of teaching possible and encourages this kind of innovation. There is a growing recognition amongst university faculty, policy makers, and administrators that without the second element, the first has little chance of success. Unless the structures and policies are in place to support teaching innovation, to recognize teaching effort and, especially, to reward performance, the teaching culture of universities will remain largely unchanged. The remainder of this review will focus on this second issue — on the structures and practices that can encourage the improvement of teaching performance, and on how some of this has emerged in specific national contexts.

Improving University Teaching

The published literature on teaching improvement is vast. It covers everything from the importance of providing support for teachers and teaching to the need to design sensitive and reliable methods for evaluating teaching performance; the imperative of establishing reward structures that recognize and validate the energy that good teaching requires; the importance of an institutional culture that supports teaching in a substantial and self-conscious way; and the necessity of enlisting faculty support in the improvement process. Individual authors tend to focus their research and commentary on one or more of these specific issues but the great majority agree that a successful programme for improving university teaching would ideally involve most of these elements.

In contrast, the practice of most universities has been far more piecemeal. There are institutions at every stage of development on the trajectory from the very simplest first steps through to a comprehensive teaching improvement programme.

Centres for Teaching Excellence

At the most basic level, commentators agree that good teaching requires support and encouragement. Certainly, the first step of many universities embarking upon a teaching improvement programme and intent on raising the profile of teaching has been the establishment of centres for teaching excellence.[7]

In their simplest incarnation, these are resource centres where faculty and teaching assistants can access materials about teaching models and techniques. Most offer links to online teaching resources and operate occasional teaching workshops for faculty at large.[8] Beyond this, some of these basic-level teaching resource centres offer orientation programmes for new faculty. These are designed to introduce newly hired academic staff to the expectations and regulations of the university and to provide support for their early teaching efforts.[9] A few of these centres go as far as establishing peer support and mentoring programmes for new faculty that connect them with established teachers who can provide them with advice and feedback on their teaching.[10]

Beyond these common offerings, some centres of teaching excellence provide more extensive instructional support programmes meant to "encourage a constant refinement and development of the practice of teaching and create an atmosphere in which teachers may discover their own most effective teaching methods" (Cornell University, 2000). Such programmes are designed for teachers at all stages in their career, rather than simply for new faculty, a step that most commentators perceive as an important one. The specific resources provided by such centres can include extensive workshop and lecture series covering a broad range of teaching issues, teaching retreats, and brown bag lunch talks; course development programmes; support for individual faculty with course design and specific teaching issues such as the effective evaluation of student learning; individual teaching consultations; classroom observations; videotaping of classroom performance; and mid-course student interviews.[11] Some centres extend their services beyond individual faculty and offer broader consultative programmes to academic units (departments, colleges, and campuses) "to help them design, implement, and assess programs that meet the specific needs of their own communities."[12]

Teacher Training

Most of the programmes offered by centres of teaching excellence focus on specific skills and problem areas, and rely on voluntary participation. In contrast, a few universities have moved toward making new faculty programmes obligatory in the hope of providing a strong initial boost to the teaching of this portion of the university faculty.[13] Other institutions are convinced that good teaching is dependent upon sustained early training in university teaching. As a consequence, a number of universities have established graduate courses or programmes in teaching in higher education.[14] These have been established, in the words of one programme administrator, "to offset the traditional imbalance...where [graduate] students used to be assessed exclusively on their skills and talents as prospective researchers with no comparable assessment of their abilities as teachers"(*University Affairs,* 1999). A few institutions have gone beyond the common assortment of faculty workshops and seminars and have established more formal courses in university teaching for faculty. In Canada, the University of British Columbia is one of a number of universities that has adopted this practice (*University Affairs,* 1999). Their Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth offers a year-long course that encourages a more learning-centred approach to teaching and helps participants focus on how they teach. On the completion of the course's 150 hours of work, participants are awarded a formal certificate. The same kind of model has been adopted at a number of universities in the United States.[15] In both countries, these certification programmes are purely elective. In the United Kingdom and Norway, by contrast, the process of certification has been formalized and the same step is being contemplated in Australia and Sweden (Riddell,1998; see also Gibbs, no date), Canadian commentators, in discussing the possibility of formalizing the certification process, point out a number of disadvantages: it

is not clear that formal certification actually ensures better teaching; a formal certification process runs the risk of separating the teaching from the research function of faculty and as a consequence weakening the ideal balance and resulting synergy between the two; and uniform teaching standards can ignore important differences in how various disciplines need to be taught. They, and their American counterparts, by and large seem inclined to think that teacher training and certification can be more sensitively and flexibly managed on an institution by institution basis.[16]

Faculty Evaluation

Teaching support programmes, however extensive or rigorous, are not enough, most commentators argue, to successfully implement a comprehensive teaching improvement programme or to raise the profile of teaching significantly. A number of other components must be in place. Of these, the first is an effective programme of teaching evaluation that can provide an objective measure of teaching performance and a guide to faculty on areas of strength and weakness. Beyond its practical significance, a strong commitment to the evaluation of teaching also arguably serves a symbolic purpose in signalling the value an institution places on teaching quality (Way, 1997).

Student Evaluation of Faculty. The importance of some form of teaching evaluation has long been recognized, and as a result a great many universities have well-established student course and faculty evaluation programmes. These generally consist of questionnaires administered to students near the end of a course that allow them to provide feedback on the course design and content and on the instructor's performance; less frequently, mid-course evaluations are conducted. Much has been written over the years about the student evaluation of faculty. Overall most commentators agree that, properly designed and administered, these forms can provide useful feedback to faculty and administrators.[17] The literature repeatedly warns, however, that it is important to be aware of the limitations of such surveys and of how they can best be used. In particular, commentators repeatedly stress that while students may be able to reliably judge certain factors such as instructor preparedness, they are less able to judge other matters such as course content. Likewise, questionnaires are useful tools for the assessment of classroom performance, but they are not very effective at assessing other facets of teaching such as one-on-one consultation with students, the supervision of fieldwork, etc.

As a consequence of the limitations inherent in student evaluations of courses and instructors, most commentators argue that the results of this process should always be used in conjunction with the results from other evaluation tools.[18] Nonetheless, a great many universities continue to rely exclusively on student evaluations as a teaching assessment tool.

The Teaching Dossier. An increasing number of institutions have begun to endorse a second tool — the teaching dossier or portfolio. The teaching dossier serves in one sense as a simple record of teaching achievement. It contains syllabi, descriptions of assignments, the results of student evaluations, and other material that helps capture the individual's teaching philosophy, history, and current activity. Beyond this it is meant to reflect the individual instructor's thoughts about the improvement of course design and delivery. Properly designed, commentators argue, the dossier can serve as a tool that promotes self-assessment and improvement, and also as part of the instructor's c.v. for use in the faculty evaluation process. To date, the former use is the most common although some institutions have started to use the dossier for evaluative purposes. The growing awareness of the potential of the teaching dossier is reflected in the growth of a substantial literature about it and by an explosion of workshops designed to help faculty learn to compile an effective dossier. As the literature suggests, however, while an

effectively constructed dossier may be an invaluable tool, a poorly thought out dossier programme can waste a great deal of faculty time and energy.[19] Some faculty also express the concern that the dossier may tend to privilege those faculty who adopt flashy techniques and attend endless teaching seminars over those whose teaching is already solid, thoughtful, and effective.

Peer Review. Another important tool for faculty assessment is peer review. The peer review process has long been essential to the assessment of scholarly research. Many commentators argue that faculty teaching must similarly be laid open to the scrutiny of the teacher's peers for it to gain the same respect accorded faculty research efforts. The peer review process also has certain concrete advantages. For example, there are arguably facets of teaching that only faculty can properly judge, such as an instructor's mastery of the subject area. Also, good teaching entails learning from experience — something that is "difficult to pursue alone;" peer review helps break down the isolation of university teaching by providing an opportunity for collaboration and dialogue that is a powerful mechanism for teaching improvement (Hutchins, 1995). There is, however, much discussion about how the process of peer review can be most effectively structured and much concern that, poorly designed, the process can be ineffectual. Commentators emphasize, in particular, the need for peer evaluators to be properly trained; the desirability of broadening the range of strategies for peer review to capture the "substance of scholarly teaching"[20] including course design and the impact on student learning rather than simply classroom performance; the importance of sensitivity to disciplinary peculiarities; the challenge of accommodating and evaluating a variety of instructional methods; problems of confidentiality; and the importance of assessing teaching quality as opposed simply to quantity of teaching. Beyond the specific issue of how the peer evaluation process needs to work, there is a general concern that the demands of peer evaluation will add another and substantial responsibility onto the shoulders of an already overburdened professoriate.

Other Evaluation Tools. There are a number of other tools for faculty assessment and evaluation beyond the three described above. These methods include: alumni letters and surveys; focus group interviews and exit interviews with enrolled students; and external evaluation. None of these is as popular with either North American universities themselves or in the existing literature, as those already discussed. External evaluation is, however, common in the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia, as will be discussed below.

Formative or Summative Evaluation. Each of these assessment tools can be used either for formative or summative purposes. The first is about providing feedback to the individual faculty member as a first step in the self-analysis required for effective teaching improvement. The feedback of students on how an instructor has performed in class; his or her own thoughts on how a set of assignments or the structure of a course itself might be redesigned, prompted by the process of preparing a teaching dossier; and the advice of a respected colleague on how a particular facet of the instructor's teaching might be enhanced — all contribute to a process of self-evaluation that commentators see as critical to teaching improvement. The use of these same assessment tools by departments, universities, or external bodies to judge an individual's teaching performance as a criteria for hiring, tenure, or advancement, is described as a summative process. The summative process has as its chief goal the measurement of how well an individual instructor has performed, which distinguishes it from the largely reflective or self-analytical goals of formative evaluation.

While the same tool can be used for both formative and summative ends, these two purposes can sometimes be at odds. To work most effectively, the formative evaluation process

requires that the instructor be open and forthright, and willing to face honestly his or her strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. In contrast, the process of summative evaluation puts pressure on the university teacher to cast his or her teaching performance in the most favourable light possible. Warts must be concealed because they suggest that the instructor is less than perfect. Thus the summative process of evaluation may hinder the process of formative assessment. This means, commentators stress, that universities must be very clear about their objective in encouraging the evaluation of teaching, and may want to consider using distinct tools for the two purposes. By and large, the emphasis within North American universities at present is on the use of these tools as part of a formative process, but some universities have begun to formally evaluate faculty as a component of the tenure and promotion process and in the assessment of merit pay.[21]

Recognizing and Rewarding Teaching

The drive toward faculty evaluation is bolstered in part by the growing conviction that good teaching must be rewarded if teaching improvement is to be effectively encouraged. Commentators argue that the reward structure within a university is a major determinant of faculty priorities. If research performance is the primary factor in determining career advancement, it sends a clear signal to faculty that effort expended on teaching is not valued. Instead, the reward structure of the university must be realigned to support and reinforce faculty's intrinsic commitment to the quality of teaching. As one commentator has observed, "if improving the quality of teaching and learning is a high priority, then the tenure, promotion, and merit pay system must support quality efforts to redesign the curriculum, improve courses, and increase the effectiveness of teaching."[22]

The other impetus toward the summative evaluation of faculty is the determination of some university administrators and legislators to establish objective measures of the quality of instructors' teaching as a prerequisite to hiring or advancement. In this sense, the emphasis on evaluating faculty is less on encouraging improved teaching than on requiring a certain standard of teaching performance, of ensuring that faculty teach to a certain level throughout their career. What differs is the primary motivation of those establishing the evaluative process. The groups that pursue these two rather different objectives can sometimes find themselves at odds over the selection of effective indicators of teaching excellence. There is evidence, however, that in some jurisdictions these two parties have found ways of reconciling their divergent objectives and of harmonizing their approaches in the mutual pursuit of better teaching and higher standards of performance (*AAHE Bulletin, 2000).*

Teaching Awards. At many institutions, the first step towards rewarding excellence in university teaching is the establishment of one or a series of annual teaching awards. The recipients are acknowledged before the university community at large for their exemplary teaching performance, in an act designed to serve as a signal that the institution values teaching as well as research (for example, Carleton University put great emphasis on its teaching awards programme). Some commentators warn that these award programmes may have a limited impact. The teachers singled out for such recognition tend to be extraordinarily gifted, and this can serve to discourage other faculty from believing that they can ever compete. At the same time, the limited number of such awards means that their impact in any given year is quite limited. Instead, most commentators agree that the recognition of teaching quality needs to be embedded into the very structures of career advancement within academe.

Merit pay. The evaluation of teaching can be used as one of the components in determining merit pay. Although faculty are not necessarily motivated primarily by financial reward, recognizing teaching through merit pay sends a

signal to faculty of what an institution values. This practice has been adopted by a number of American institutions, but has been less popular in Canada, where faculty associations have tended to oppose merit pay (Grant, 1998; Johnson & Tuckman, 1985; Marchant & Newman, 1991; Reiser, 1995.)

Tenure and promotion. Most commentators believe that the most effective way of encouraging teaching improvement is to make teaching excellence a prerequisite in the tenure and promotion process. Alongside excellence in research, the quality of faculty members' teaching should be a matter of significant importance in assessing a candidate's worthiness for advancement. This sends a clear signal to faculty that time and effort spent on teaching will be rewarded, instead of simply serving as a distraction from their research agenda.

While many institutions claim to expect of their faculty excellence in both teaching and research, most commentators argue that few bother to look closely enough at a candidate's teaching performance to make this a credible claim. Motherhood statements concerning the importance of teaching bear fruit only when backed by programmes of rigorous teaching evaluation. A considerable number of universities in the United States, including the University Florida and the University of California, have instituted programmes that commit to the formal evaluation of teaching performance, as an equal criterion with research performance, in their tenure and promotion process.[23] Many commentators suggest that individual universities or departments may want to establish a more flexible balance between research and teaching in order to accommodate their individual needs.

In all of this, there is a strong concern that the burden of such faculty evaluation programmes will fall most heavily on new faculty coming up for tenure and that — although teaching performance may be factored into the promotion process — the faculty exposed to the most stringent evaluation will be those most recently hired.

Post-tenure review. In a step that goes beyond the evaluation of teaching performance as part of the faculty hiring and promotion process, a considerable number of legislative bodies in the United States have pressed for the establishment of a post-tenure review process.[24] Post-tenure review involves the "periodic formal institutional evaluation of each post probationary faculty member" (AAUP, 1999). Its specific application can vary. In some cases, faculty whose performance has been found to be unsatisfactory can be "required to enter either a faculty development plan or a performance improvement plan, depending on the extent of the deficiency" (University of Arizona, 2001). At its most far-reaching and controversial, post-tenure review aims to reopen the question of tenure and requires faculty to demonstrate why they should be retained (AAUP, 1999). The implementation of such programmes has been fraught with acrimony, although it is evident that compromises have been made within certain jurisdictions that have ultimately allowed the process to function more easily (*AAHE Bulletin,* 2000).

The status of tenure. Another component of the discussion around teaching performance centres on the institution of tenure itself. The concern is that once faculty are awarded tenure, there is little incentive for teaching improvement. The post-tenure review process in the United States grew in some instances out of an initial opposition by state legislators to the concept of tenure (*AAHE Bulletin,* 2000, see also Davis, 1988). Tenure has also been an important issue of public debate in Canada (see in particular, Ormrod, 1996). Commentators almost all believe that tenure is compatible with good teaching, but they do argue that post tenure teaching evaluation must have real teeth. A real commitment to the quality of teaching throughout a faculty member's career, is a crucial impetus to all university teachers — both

pre- and post-tenure — to put in the effort required for strong teaching, many commentators argue (see Clifton & Rubenstein, 1998).

Creating a University Culture that Supports Teaching

Teaching improvement inevitably depends on the willingness of individual instructors to reflect upon and alter the way they teach. But the success of a programme for teaching improvement and evaluation also requires the commitment of individual departments, faculties, and institutions as a whole.

Commentators suggest that university administrators must work to create a culture that is supportive of teaching, that validates the effort that faculty devote to it, and that sends a clear message that research performance is not the only measure of faculty's worth. This can be done through the rewriting of university mission statements; the active support of teaching improvement programmes, including teaching relief for instructors working to redesign their course offerings; the establishment of effective programmes for teaching evaluation with clearly defined goals; and the creation of a comprehensive process for the reward not only of teaching performance but also teaching improvement. The university's goal must be to put real substance behind their commitment to teaching, rather than simply to pay it lip service.[25]

Individual departments or faculties also have a responsibility for supporting teaching improvement. Good teaching is not simply a product of individual effort, but of department-wide support and planning, a number of commentators suggest. Departments need to ensure that a portion of departmental colloquia concern teaching-related issues, rather than always the presentation of research results; to offer graduate courses that incorporate issues around teaching as well as intensive discussions of research-related topics; and to offer release time to faculty to focus on teaching development. The objective in all of this is to promote an environment that validates teaching as a pursuit and promotes discussion amongst students and faculty of teaching issues.

Departmental planning is also an important component in ensuring teaching excellence. Departmental teaching goals and objectives need to be clarified; course offerings need to be carefully planned to meet the learning needs of students; thought must be given to the creative restructuring of core offerings; senior faculty should be encouraged to teach lower-level courses; an effort should be made to achieve the best match between instructors and courses; and new ways should be considered for the delivery of core material.[26]

Enlisting Faculty Support for Teaching Improvement

The design and implementation of a process for teaching improvement, evaluation, and reward can encounter considerable faculty opposition (see Blank, 1978; University of California, 1991). Faculty can be concerned that good teachers are born, rather than made; they see the ability to teach as an innate quality that no amount of teacher training or self-reflection can replicate. Another concern is that good teaching cannot really be measured; faculty in particular express the fear that many evaluative tools tend to measure busyness — enrolment in teaching workshops and papers given on pedagogical issues — rather than real teaching ability and results. They may also worry that the evaluation of teaching performance may impose a pedagogical straight-jacket on teachers. Running through much of this is the further fear that teaching evaluation will take up too much time — that the creation of a teaching dossier, for example, will require many hours of unproductive work by faculty who are already over-burdened. The whole process is seen by some as a time consuming and largely fruitless one, which will place ever more pressure on younger scholars and have little impact on more established faculty. And behind everything is the fear that any such

process will mean that some faculty are denied promotion or may even lose their jobs.

Commentators respond to such concerns by arguing that properly designed, sensitively and gradually implemented programmes for teaching improvement, evaluation and reward can address these issues. They acknowledge that while some faculty members are natural teachers, most have to learn the skills that will make them good teachers. They also agree that the assessment of good teaching is a sensitive process requiring that institutions clearly define what they mean by the term; but they maintain that there are ways to evaluate teaching effectively. These evaluative tools, moreover, can be flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of teaching styles. Similarly, commentators offer specific reassurance to the concerns that faculty evaluation takes too much time, is pointless, and will result in job loss (see Felder, et al., 2000).

Commentators stress, however much specific reassurance they may offer, that faculty fears must be taken seriously. Without administrative support and faculty collaboration, programmes for performance evaluation and accountability have limited chance of success. The key to motivating both administrators and instructors is to make the process university- and faculty-driven. Most authors argue that the design of the evaluative process and reward structures within individual institutions — as well as within their distinctive departments and faculties — must be shaped by the members of the university community themselves. These structures and practices need to reflect the culture of each institution and their component parts, reflecting differences in practice and the distinctive needs and constraints of specific disciplines.[27] American observers in particular note that the alternative to a faculty-driven approach to the design and implementation of a teaching improvement, evaluation, and reward process may be that universities will be forced by legislatures to adopt policies and practices that they may find less congenial. Thus, Pat Hutchins, director of the American Association for Higher Education's "Teaching Initiative" argued strongly in the mid-late 1990s in favour of peer review of teaching on the grounds that it "puts faculty in charge of the quality of their work as teachers; as such, it's an urgently needed alternative to more bureaucratic forms of accountability that otherwise will be imposed from outside academe."[28]

National Variations in Approaches to Faculty Performance and Accountability

There is considerable variation in how different countries in the industrialized west have responded to the issue of teaching performance and evaluation.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, issues around teaching performance and evaluation have formed one part of a much broader discussion about academic accountability. There, the trend has been towards the establishment of a heavily bureaucratic process for the external evaluation of standards of performance in every facet of university operations. Overseeing the entire process is the "Quality Assurance Agency" established in 1997 "to provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education institutions." The mission of the Agency "is to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced."[29]

Europe

In continental Europe, issues of teaching performance and evaluation have similarly been caught up with broader issues of quality assurance and quality management in higher education.[30] There, a system of external academic audits has been established that looks quite broadly at "the strategic management process" within universities rather than at specific aspects of performance as is more the case in

Britain (Dill, 2000). Beyond the active management of the quality of higher education in Europe, there is substantial scholarly interest in these issues. The Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, at Universiteit Twente, Netherlands, for example, is a research institute that "seeks to make a significant contribution to the understanding of policy-making, governance and management in higher education."[31]

International

Internationally, UNESCO has sponsored a number of conferences and workshops on standards of teaching, evaluation and accountability;[32] and the International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) has been established "to promote educational or academic development in higher education worldwide." The ICED functions as a network whose "members are themselves national organisations or networks concerned with promoting good practice in higher education." The current chair of its Council is Pat Rogers, Academic Director of the Centre for the Support of Teaching, York University, Toronto.[33]

The United States

In the United States, discussions of total quality management and the academic audit process have been less prominent than in Europe. While only one part of a larger discussion of many facets of university operations and management, the issue of teaching performance and evaluation has emerged as a distinct matter for debate and action. Also in contrast to Britain and much of continental Europe, the United States has generally eschewed external evaluation in favour of institutional initiative.

American institutions of higher education vary greatly in the extent to which they have initiated any of the kinds of changes that this paper has described. Many have made little more than pro-forma steps to support teaching improvement and to evaluate performance. Amongst the remainder, there are institutions that have developed specific initiatives for teaching improvement and evaluation, and others that are working on the implementation of much more comprehensive programmes. A number are distinguished for the substantiveness of the analyses that they have made of facets of this issue, which have produced documentation that stands as a resource for all parties. (These have included the University of Florida; University of North Carolina; the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Cornell University; Northeastern University; and the University of Michigan.)

Beyond these individual institutional efforts, several larger pilot projects have been conducted in the United States. The American Association for Higher Education conducted a "Peer Review of Teaching" project over a number of years beginning in 1994 in which 12 institutions participated, and continues to administer other programmes under its "Teaching Initiatives Project." The most significant of these, the "Teaching Academy Campus Programme," is operated in conjunction with the Carnegie Foundation. This programme "is designed for institutions of all types that are prepared to make a public commitment to foster and support the scholarship of teaching and learning."[34] There are also many associations, institutes, and organizations now conducting projects on teaching performance and evaluation; these include the National Academy for Academic Leadership at Syracuse University, whose purpose it is to educate academic decision makers "to be leaders for sustained, integrated institutional change that significantly improves student learning,"[35] and the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, which has sponsored a broadly based project on faculty performance and compensation.[36]

Canada

In Canada, universities have been less active than many of those in the United States in implementing teaching improvement and evaluation programmes. Almost all have established centres of teaching excellence and offer workshops and courses on teaching related

issues, but by and large their programmes are focused on graduate students and new faculty, and less on supporting established teaching staff. Departments seeking new faculty increasingly require statements of teaching philosophy and occasionally teaching dossiers from candidates, but untenured faculty are unclear how significantly their teaching performance will weigh in against their research record. For years, many Canadian universities have been administering student surveys of faculty teaching performance. However, beyond the occasional peer evaluation programme for newly hired academic teaching faculty, there has been little done in Canadian universities to establish other processes for evaluating teaching performance.[37] Indeed, it is striking, in reviewing the documentation produced by Canadian universities, how substantially the language that they use in talking about teaching — and its relationship to research — differs from that which is increasingly seen in the United States.

A number of institutions in Canada do stand out for the kinds of programmes and initiatives they have implemented. Dalhousie University, in particular, has developed a strong programme to encourage faculty there to prepare teaching dossiers, and offers a summer workshop for university teachers (O'Neil & Wright, 1992).[38] A few universities actively encourage their faculty to prepare teaching dossiers (for example, UBC) and Guelph University has made their use obligatory.[39] Dalhousie, Guelph, and York universities, the University of Saskatchewan, and the University of British Columbia have introduced other innovations to assess and encourage teaching improvement.[40]

The issue of teaching performance and evaluation has been raised by the 1991 Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education(AUCC, 1991) and a number of provincial task forces including Manitoba's Roblin Commission and the "Ontario Task Force on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education" (Province of Ontario, 1996; Roblin, 1993). It has helped prompt the creation of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education which is a "a national association of academics interested in the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education;"[41] and has been a prominent item on the programme of the annual Canadian Institutional Researchers and Planners Conference.[42] As yet, however, it has not given rise to the kind of broad non-institutional programmes that have been established in the United States, nor to the same kind of substantive discussion that has occurred elsewhere of the broader issues around quality assurance and accountability.

Conclusion

This broad survey of the international literature on teaching quality, faculty performance and accountability demonstrates that there is an enormous quantity of material on the subject, which originates in particular from the United States but to which scholars and policy makers in Canada, Britain, Australia, Europe, and elsewhere have contributed. A substantial portion of this material is produced by education researchers, many allied with specialized institutes for research in higher education, who have made it their business to study aspects of this issue; but much of it is the working documentation produced by university task forces, centres of teaching excellence, and administrative bodies. It reflects the often-divergent objectives of public policy makers, university administrators, faculty organizations, and scholars. But it also reflects the determination of these quite different groups to work towards a common goal of ensuring the quality of university teaching. Some commentators come to the issue with the assumption that conditions within the universities are desperate; while others think the universities are doing a good job. Some are completely uninterested in faculty's role as researchers, while others are committed to enhancing the connection between teaching

and research. The views of all are formed, at least in part, by the specific context with which they are familiar. What is particularly clear is how much the experience of faculty and students in different institutions in different countries can vary.

Compiled together, this material provides an invaluable resource for anyone concerned with the question of teaching quality, performance evaluation and accountability. It can be mined for the lessons, warnings, and examples that it contains, and serves as a strong reminder not only of how current the issues around teaching evaluation are, but also how critical it is that we approach them in an organized, thoughtful and creative fashion.

Notes

[1] This report was funded by a Max Bell Foundation Internship Grant. My thanks to Professor Robert Wright of Trent University for his advice and support in preparing this text.

[2] This dialogue has been evinced most strikingly in the annual *Maclean's* survey of Canadian universities.

[3] In many American universities, a third component — "service" or "community outreach" has been added to this list of faculty responsibilities. See, for example, Farmer & Schomberg (1993), Hawthorne & Ninke (1990), Magner (1997) and Patton (1994).

[4] For a self-conscious exposition of this view see Marincovich (1997), Oakley (1995), Ohio State (1999), University of Tennessee (1999a) and Way (1997) which explains that the "handbook is designed to serve as a guide to encourage a view of teaching practice and its evaluation that reflects the intellectual challenges and richness that are an integral part of it, a view that does not dichotomize teaching and research activities as competitive with each other, but as two integrated aspects of scholarly activity."

[5] As cited in National Academy for Academic Leadership (2000); see similarly Cornell University (1997) which argued that "teaching has not been given the same degree of respect, recognition, or reward as a faculty member's contributions to research."

[6] As cited in McMaster University Students Union (no date).

[7] At least 37 Canadian universities have established centres of teaching excellence according to *University Affairs* (1999); see also Riddell (1990).

[8] See, for example, the programme offered by the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Education, Brock University, Ontario, http://www.brocku.ca/ctl/facutlyservices.html

[9] See, for example, the programmes offered by the Instructional Development Office, Wilfrid Laurier University, ON; and the Teaching and Learning Resource Centre, Carleton University, ON. See McMaster University (no date).

[10] On such mentoring programmes see Selby & Calhoun (1998) and Lyons (1996). See specifically, Wilfrid Laurier University's programme for new faculty, and the *New Faculty Mentoring Program,* Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, Northern Illinois University, http://www.niu.edu/facdev/development/mentornew.htm

[11] One of the most extensive programmes is offered by the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, http://www.crlt.umich.edu/mission.htm See also, the Office of Faculty and TA Development, Ohio State University, http://www.osu.edu/education/ftad/; the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Penn State, http://www.psu.edu/celt/index.html; Center for Effective University Teaching, Northeastern University; Teaching Excellence Center, Rutgers University, http://teachx.rutgers.edu/tec/mission.html; the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Stanford, http://www-ctl.stanford.edu/general.html. In Canada, see the Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth, UBC, http://www.cstudies.ubc.ca/facdev/index.html; Teaching Support Services, Guelph University, http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/abouttss.html

[12] *Assessment & Consultations,* Center for Teaching and Learning, Penn State, http://www.psu.edu/celt/assessment.shtml

[13] See, for example, the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine which has made new faculty mentoring programmes obligatory, *Requirement of an Academic Development Plan For All New Faculty Appointments,* Office of the Chair, Faculty of Medicine, Effective July 1, 1999, http://dfcm19.med.utoronto.ca/chair/adp.htm

[14] These courses may be elective, compulsory, or optional, non-credit courses. See for example the University of Toronto's *Teaching in Higher Education,* York University's *University Teaching Practicum,* and the University of Waterloo's certificate in university teaching. On this see also Schonwetter (2000).

15 On such programmes in the United States see Glazer (1993); and the *Preparing Future Faculty initiative*, http://www.preparing-faculty.org/

16 On the issue as a whole, see the papers given at the 1996 ICED conference "Preparing University Teachers," http://www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/teachers/abs_ind.html #abs42 ; see also McKeachie (1997).

17 For instance, the quality of student responses can be enhanced if students are made aware that the administration/faculty take this feedback seriously. See on this issue more broadly, Marincovich (1998).

18 See, in particular, University of California (1991). See also McKeachie & Kaplan (no date);. University of Michigan (2002).

19 On the proper design and use of the teaching dossier see, in particular Kaplan (1998), O'Neil & Wright (1992), Ross, Bondy, et al. (1995), University of Tennessee (1999b).

20 The University of California is a particularly strong advocate of peer review, see Switkes (1999). See also, University of Nebraska (2001) and University of North Carolina (1997).

21 Most of the literature on teaching evaluation discusses this issue which is one of central importance. See Cavanagh, R.R. (1996), Centra (1987), and Morehead & Shedd (1997).

22 National Academy for Academic Leadership (2000). On the importance of rewarding good teaching see also, Ross, Barfield, et al. (1995) and University of Nebraska (2000).

23 Ross, Barfield, et al. (1995) , Switkes (1999). Other universities that are explicit about their commitment to the evaluation of teaching in the tenure and promotion process include the University of Berkley; Clemson University; Cornell University; University of Iowa; University of Virginia; and University of Washington.

24 According to *AAHE Bulletin* (2000), "Fully 37 states now report they have established systemwide policies [of post-tenure review], have policies in place within selected state institutions, or currently are considering and/or developing such policies."

25 Two Canadian universities that have put considerable effort into creating a supportive teaching environment are Dalhousie and McGill. See Dalhousie's *Celebration of University Teaching* event, October 2000, http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/cut.html; and Bernard J. Shapiro (Principal and Vice-Chancellor McGill University), *Thinking About McGill: A Planning Framework for the Future*, McGill University, 1998, http://www.mcgill.ca/administration/principal/documents/thinking/ See also Robert M. Diamond, *Aligning Faculty Rewards with Institutional Mission: Statements, Policies, and Guidelines*, http://www.ankerpub.com/books/diamond3.html

26 These points are discussed throughout the literature on teaching improvement but see specifically, Felder, et al. (2000). See also, Wergin (1994) and Diamond (1994).

27 See on this, Way (1997) See also, Maitland Schilling & Schilling (1998), Murray (1995), Peters (1994), and Quinlan (1994).

28 http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/highered/index.htm

29 http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/aboutQAA.htm

30 Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, Universiteit Twente, http://www.utwente.nl/cheps/research/quality/

31 http://www.utwente.nl/cheps/

32 http://www.unesco.org/iau/tfaf_working_doc.html

33 http://www.edu.yorku.ca/~rogers/ICED/index.html

34 http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/highered/teachingacademy.htm

35 http://www.thenationalacademy.org/About/about.html

36 *Project on Faculty Performance and Compensation* Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/index2.html

37 For an assessment of the limitations of McMaster University's faculty evaluation efforts see, Scriven Talks about Evaluating Teaching at McMaster, http://www.mcmaster.ca/mufa/scriven.htm

38 The Instructional Development and Technology Office at Dalhousie also runs an annual summer workshop on the use and design of the teaching dossier: *The Recording Teaching Accomplishment Institute*, http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/instit2.html

39 See "Section E: Tenure and Promotion Policy," *Faculty Policy Manual*, Guelph University, ON, http://www.uoguelph.ca/HR/facpol/toc.htm McGill University, QC has similarly declared that, "Ateaching portfolio is required of all McGill academic staff for the tenure and promotion exercise. Guidelines are specified in the Handbook of Regulation and Policies for Academics." http://www.education.mcgill.ca/cutl/portfolio.html

40 UBC operates, amongst other programmes, a mentoring programme for new faculty; a teaching support programme which pairs award-winning teachers with faculty who would like input on their teaching

methods or course design; a workshop on the design of a teaching dossier; a university teaching certification programme; and has conducted a senate review of "Teaching Quality, Effectiveness, and Evaluation."

41 http://www.umanitoba.ca/academic_support/uts/stlhe/ The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) hopes, as part of their objective, to increase the emphasis "on teaching in post-secondary education and to encourage and improve teaching and learning."

42 http://www.cirpa-acpri.ca/toronto97/97_proceedings/index.html

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